

Frequently Asked Questions about the Clean Water Service Fee

Questions about your Clean Water Service Fee?

You can probably find the answer below. Please read on!

- 1. Where does the money raised go?** The money stays in the Clean Water fund and does not go anywhere else. Money is used to implement the Clean Water Program's five areas of effort, including capital improvement projects, water quality monitoring, enforcement and regulations, education and outreach, and operations and maintenance.
- 2. What is an impervious area?** Impervious areas have impervious (hard) surfaces that prevent water from entering the ground. Water that doesn't enter the ground runs off these hard surfaces as stormwater, often picking up pollutants before entering stormdrains, rivers, lakes, and groundwater. As defined by the *Washington Department of Ecology 2001 Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington*, impervious areas range from compacted earth to parking lots, roads, rooftops, etc.
- 3. What is a base unit?** A base unit is 3,500 square feet of impervious surface, the average for a single-family residential unit in unincorporated Clark County. These units are sometimes referred to as "equivalent residential units" or "ERUs."
- 4. What can I expect to pay per year?**
Owners of single-family residential parcels less than ½ acre pay \$33 per year. The fee for owners of larger single-family lots decreases by parcel size as follows:
 - Over ½ acre to 1 acre = \$29.70
 - Over 1 acre to 5 acres = \$26.40
 - Over 5 acres to 20 acres = \$23.10
 - Over 20 acres = 19.80

Owners of multi-family dwellings, such as apartments buildings, pay \$33 per dwelling.

Owners of commercial, industrial, and local and state governmental property, including state and local highways and roads, pay a fee based on the amount of hard surface on their respective parcels.

This fee is calculated by dividing the total square feet of

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impervious surface by 3,500 (the base unit), and multiplying the result by 33.

Example: For a business with 150,000 square feet of impervious surface, divide 150,000 by 3,500 to get 42.85 base units. Multiply $42.85 \times \$33.00 = \$1,415.00$ per year.

- 5. Can I pay my Clean Water Fee over the phone?** Payments may be made by check, payable to the Clark County Treasurer. Pay in person at the Treasurer's Office in the Public Service Center, 1300 Franklin Street, second floor, in downtown Vancouver. Mail your check to the Treasurer's Office, PO Box 9808, Vancouver, WA 98666-8808. Payments may also be made at any 1st Independent Bank. To make a payment by Visa or Mastercard, go to <http://www.clark.wa.gov/treasurer/property/index.html>; look up your property, then click on the Pay Online button. There is a \$35 charge for online payments.
- 6. I have a well. Why do I have to pay?** All residents in unincorporated Clark County are required to pay the Clean Water Fee to help prevent stormwater pollution from entering surface water and groundwater.
- 7. Why did we not get to vote on this?** Because the county had no choice about implementing this program—it is federally mandated. The Board of County Commissioners adopted the fee rate that was recommended by a Clean Water Funding Task Force. The task force was made up of Clark County residents.
- 8. Is this just another tax?** No, this is a fee. The money raised by the fee is to be used only for the Clean Water Program and no other government operations.
- 9. Is this fee deductible?** No. The Clean Water Fee is not a tax and therefore is not tax deductible.
- 10. What if I don't pay this fee?** Clean Water Fee bills are due by July 31 each year, after which interest and penalties begin to accrue. The Treasurer's Office can put a lien on your property until the fees are paid in full. Fees can also be sent to a collections agency.
- 11. What if there is an error on my Clean Water Fee bill?** Contact the Treasurer's Office at (360) 397-2252 or Water Resources at (360) 397-6118 ext. 4345.
- 12. I am being charged for a fee for a previous year and I didn't even own the property at that time. Do I still have to pay?** Yes. The fee follows the parcel and must be paid by the current parcel owner. The parcel owner is ultimately responsible for seeing that the fee is paid in full, including any fee that has carried over from previous years. You might want to contact your escrow company to see if it was included in the escrow report.



13. I pay \$33 each year. Why isn't the county mowing the bioswale outside my property? Please contact our Maintenance and Operations Center at (360) 397-2446. We will take a look at the facility and see what the issue is. While the county *inspects* public and private stormwater facilities, it only maintains and operates county-owned facilities.

14. I am doing a wonderful job with my property. Why do I have to pay this fee? While we encourage residents in unincorporated Clark County to be good stewards of their properties, we cannot make exceptions on that basis. Clean water benefits all residents, and all residents are equally responsible for paying the fee.

15. I was ordered by the county to put in stormwater erosion control measures for my business. Why do I also have to pay this fee? These measures apply to businesses to ensure that their practices do not degrade water quality. They are separate from the Clean Water Fee, which applies equally to all properties in Clark County.

16. How can I appeal this fee? Call the Clean Water Program at (360) 397-6118, extension 4345 or send an e-mail to cleanwater@clark.wa.gov to request an appeal. We will mail you a form. Return the completed form to us before the deadline (45 calendar days after mailing of the bill). Staff will review the appeal and the county's Public Works Director will approve or deny the appeal. We will notify you in writing.

17. How do I find out if my mortgage company is going to pay this fee on my behalf? Contact your mortgage company.

18. How do I find out if my fee has been paid? Call the Treasurer's Office at (360) 397-2252. You can also find this information on the web at <http://www.clark.wa.gov/treasurer/property/index.html>.

19. Who can I contact to have my drinking water tested? Contact the Clark County Health Department at 397-8428.

20. Where can I find more information about the Clark County Clean Water Program? Contact Clark County Public Works Department, Water Resources Section at (360) 397-6118, extension 4345 or go to the Clark County Water Resources and Clean Water Program web site at <http://www.clark.wa.gov/water-resources>.

Still have questions?

If you have additional questions about the Clean Water Service Fee, please contact us at (360) 397-6118, extension 4345 or cleanwater@clark.wa.gov.

